

# Rural electricity connections jump to 10%

BY BENON OJIAMBO

Over the next 10 years, the Government plans to increase access to electricity in rural areas to 26% of the total rural households," President Yoweri Museveni said during the State of the Nation address in 2014.

Museveni's comments came after the launch of a 10-year Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan (RESP) covering the period between 2013 and 2022 aimed to increase access to electricity in rural areas by the Rural Electrification Agency (REA).

REA is a government institution formed in 2001 to facilitate the provision of electricity to rural areas in an equitable and sustainable manner. REA was established as a result of the energy sector reforms which led to the enactment of the new Electricity Act, 1999.

Before the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took over power in 1986, there was hardly any deliberate initiative aimed at electrifying rural areas despite housing the biggest chunk of the population.

Albeit, access to electricity was generally low with less than 10% having access to the utility though majority of it was centred in urban areas.

The electricity reforms Uganda undertook in the 1990s and culminated into the dissociation of the defunct Uganda Electricity Board (UEB) and created REA.

Then, only one in 10 people living in rural areas had access to electricity. According to Godfrey Turyahikayo, REA's executive director, this pattern was because distribution of the national grid was concentrated along major highways to the detriment of villages.

"The national grid network then had a narrow path along the main roads and major towns, reaching some 15% of the population that lived in the urban areas. About 85% of the population was living in rural areas, but only 0.85% of them had access to electricity," he said recently.

The Government then took a deliberate path towards equitable development of electricity distribution lines in the rural areas.

"The rural electrification programme's focus has mainly been on grid extension projects and project prioritisation criteria, putting into consideration other factors of social equity and equitable regional distribution," Museveni said during his State-of-Nation address last year.

He explained that the Government has consequently



President Museveni launches the rural electrification programme at Rutookye in Mitooma district on August 26, 2014. Photo by Francis Emorut



## Rural electrification

- Over **10,000km** of medium voltage power lines and **9,000 km** of low voltage distribution power lines constructed nationally

- Over **1.3 million** customers connected onto the national grid

2019: **13%**

- Increment of the rural electrification access rate:** 2001: **1%**

- Nearly all the district headquarters supplied with electricity and next phase to connect all the sub-counties by 2022

- Access to clean energy in Uganda:** **60%**

**22.5%** 2018 **60%** 2027 - Electricity Connections Policy (ECP)

**sh500,000**

- Fees charged for new connections:** **sh30,000**

installed over 10,000km of medium voltage power lines and about 9,000km of low voltage distribution power lines nationally.

"This has translated into the connections of over 1.3 million customers onto the national grid and the increment of the rural electrification access rate from 1% in 2001 to over 13% in 2019," the President said.

With nearly all the district headquarters supplied with electricity, Museveni said the agenda was now to connect all the sub-counties by 2022.

"The Government is promoting use of renewable energy technologies in the country that include solar systems for lighting rural homes and for the national grid. The country now has 40MW of solar grid connected systems," he added.

### FOCUS ON CONNECTIONS

However, the expanded network would make less economic importance if the rural citizens are not connected.

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The Government to this effect took deliberate efforts in addressing the bottlenecks such as high connection fees and house wiring costs that are blocking access to the utility, especially in rural areas.

As such, the Government in August 2018 launched the Electricity Connections Policy (ECP) with the sole aim of accelerating access to clean energy in the country from the current 22.5% to 60% in 2027.

Through the initiative, the Government subsidised the fees charged by the electricity distribution companies when getting a new connection from about sh500,000, an amount described as 'high and prohibitive', to about sh30,000 only for one in a distance that requires a single pole or no pole connection.

"The major problem of access to electricity has not been the ability to pay for it, but getting connected because many people do not have disposable income for connections," Turyahikayo said during the launch of the policy.

"We realised that unless we subsidise connections, few people will get connected to electricity despite a surplus in supply," Turyahikayo said.

### FREE READYBOARDS

The Government has also rolled out free distribution of readyboards to accelerate access to the utility to those at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

A readyboard is designed to dispense the need for conventional internal wiring of the house. It is a machine composed of provision of a socket, two bulbs, switchboard, a meter and a consumer interface unit. The consumer interface unit has a visual provision that helps the consumer load more units and also know their utility balance.

The system is expected to increase uptake of electricity among those who could afford to wire their houses.

At least 200,000 households are expected to get the first batch of readyboards in February, according to REA.